

“Come and see”

John 1:35-42

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He asked them, “What do you want?”

They asked him, “Where are you staying?”

He said, “Come and see.”

Hardly the stuff of an intriguing story or encounter. A couple of questions back and forth and an invitation. Hardly the seeds to produce any serious fruit. On the surface it seems less than promising. But those two questions back and forth, the invitation to come and see, the acceptance of that invitation, and the next thing you know one of the men invited to come and see is tracking down his brother to tell him some amazingly good news. “We have found the Messiah.”

Maybe the soil of our hearts is a little more ready for the seed to take root and grow and blossom and flourish. We have heard the promises of the Word of God who was with God in the beginning and who made all things. We have heard that the Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have listened as John the Baptist answered the question of whether he himself was the Messiah by simply saying, “I am not.” We have heard John the Baptist say, “One comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” Then, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, we heard the Baptist say, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Did these two men, who initially were disciples of John the Baptist, was the soil of their hearts ready? If they were disciples of John the Baptist, maybe they also heard him say about Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” They were obviously with John the next day, the day we just read about in our passage of scripture, they were obviously with John that next day when John again saw Jesus passing by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” We are told when these two men heard John the Baptist say this a second time, these two men followed Jesus. Maybe the soil of their hearts was ready at that time.

Maybe that is what is so intriguing about this story. Maybe there are people all around us who are more ready than we could ever believe to follow Jesus. I cannot explain how it happens, I certainly never know when it will happen, or who will be involved when it does happen, but friends, it does happen. Somehow Jesus appears...our passage today says he was passing by...somehow Jesus appears, and he comes at us with a powerful question about our life. "What do you want?"

We never know when it will happen, and part of the problem is we often do not know what we want. What do we want? Money, a house, a career, a relationship, a healthy diet, a membership at the gym, a place on the team...we often don't know what we want, or what we think we want doesn't bring us anywhere near to Jesus. But today there is the distinct possibility, the intriguing possibility, that when Jesus passes by and asks two men who are following him, "What do you want?", there is the possibility that they would ask him right back, "Where are you staying?" Meaning what? Meaning they want to follow Jesus and to know who he is and where he lives and what he does and why...why...why he is here among us...and can he...can he...can he meet the deepest needs of our longing and searching hearts. That and so much more seems to be wrapped up in the response of these two men. "Where are you staying?"

In response Jesus says, "Come and see." Bam! The journey of discipleship has begun. The seeds of a faith that will transform the human life have been planted and taken root and are beginning to grow.

When that kind of seed grows, it bears fruit. Look what happens next. One of those two men, a man named Andrew, well, Andrew had a brother. His brother's name was Simon Peter. The first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon and say, "We have found the Messiah." The writer of the Gospel wants to be sure we understand what Andrew is saying. The writer of the Gospel clarifies what Andrew is saying. "We have found the Christ." What? After a couple of questions, an invitation, and an afternoon with Jesus, Andrew has had his questions answered, his longing fulfilled, and his desire met? That is exactly what happened! "We have found the Christ." Andrew has found the Christ, and he wants his brother to share in the joy. Did I say this is hardly the stuff of an

intriguing story or encounter? I stand corrected. This is the good news of the gospel. This is evangelism. This is salvation. This is new life. This new creation. This is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

When I was a young youth pastor, not yet thirty years old, one of the elders of our church invited me to lunch. This man was a respected leader in the church. He served as the Clerk of Session. Henry was Chinese American, and when he suggested we go to his favorite Chinese restaurant I was all in. Henry explained that the restaurant served Dim Sum. Trays of exotic looking dishes giving off scintillating scents circulated around our table. Henry would point. We would be served. My taste buds would explode. What could be better than that?

Well, let me tell you what could be better than that. Over lunch, in a Chinese restaurant in downtown Fresno, California, with my eyes gleaming, my mouth drooling, and my taste buds exploding, Henry told me a story that touched my spirit and warmed my heart. Ever since I had met Henry, I assumed he had always gone to church, had always been a leader, and for all I knew, he had always been the Clerk of Session. Instead, Henry told me he never went to church. Henry told me he never had any need for God. When he was an adult, in his forties or fifties, his daughter became a Christian. Henry watched how God changed her life. Henry saw that his daughter's life was redeemed. Henry saw her restored. One day Henry's daughter told him how Jesus Christ set her free. His daughter told him how Jesus had given her new life. She told Henry the story of the cross, and the amazing love God had for his children. It was then, as an adult, a mature man who had been successful in many areas of life, a man who had learned to stand up tall and proud, it was then Henry realized how much he not only needed Jesus, Henry realized how much he wanted Jesus. With tears in his eyes, while plates of Chinese food were passing us on our left and on our right, Henry told me the story of how he came to worship Jesus Christ. No one forced him. No one compelled him. God did not draw him to himself by overpowering him and twisting his arm. God loved him. A daughter told her father, "We have found the Christ." A daughter invited her father to, "Come and see." And her father found his own faith in Jesus Christ.

Come and see. How many times and in how many ways that are drastically and dramatically different, and yet when you boil it all down are all so sweet and so similar...how many times has one person approached another and said, "We have found the Christ. Come and see."

A youth pastor found out one of the kids in youth group was having a birthday. The youth pastor called the kid up and asked if he wanted to go out to lunch for his birthday. Hardly the stuff of an intriguing story or encounter. I mean, the two of them went to Wendy's. It was nothing fancy. Unbeknownst to this young kid, his youth pastor was a clever fellow. He invited the kid to come by his house before they went to lunch. When the kid arrived the youth pastor took him outside to show him the backyard. With a troubled look the youth pastor said, "I have all these leaves on the ground. I don't think I will ever get them all raked up. Say, do you think you could help rake these before we go out to lunch?" The kid was young and gullible. He grabbed a rake and made big piles, ultimately hauling them away. The yard looked great. The youth pastor returned...on no, he had not stayed and raked the leaves...the youth pastor returned and was effusive in his praise. You worked so hard. You did a great job.

By this point the kid had worked up a big appetite. He started walking toward the house when the youth pastor slyly said, "Did you notice the swimming pool?" The pool was littered with leaves. Nodding toward the pool equipment the youth pastor said, "Get the pool clean and then we will have lunch." Another hour passed as the hard working, industrious kid cleaned the pool until it sparkled and shined. The youth pastor returned...oh no, he had not stayed and worked on the pool...the youth pastor returned and was effusive in his praise. You worked so hard. You did a good job. By this point the kid was not only ready for lunch, he felt he was owed a big, hearty, expensive lunch. The youth pastor said, "Let's go. Get in my car." The kid literally raced to the front yard. There he found a VW bug, an old school one, itsy bitsy. The youth pastor said, "Do you mind riding in back. Promise needs to be in the front seat."

Promise was the youth pastor's German Shepherd. Who invited Promise to lunch? Oh no, it wasn't time for lunch yet. The youth pastor said, "We need to take Promise to the vet first." Sitting in the back seat of a VW bug, with Promise and her abundant hair she shed so profusely, the kid was beginning to question his decision to let his youth pastor

take him out to lunch. Well, Promise had her visit, they returned the dog home, and at around 4:30 in the afternoon they headed to lunch. They drove by a nice steakhouse. They passed a delicious Italian eatery. They didn't stop at the town's best pizza parlor. They pulled into a Wendy's. How do you think that kid felt after the leaves, after the pool, after the trip to the vet, after being covered with 50 pounds of dog hair, after 4 or 5 hours of chores...on his birthday...how do you think that kid felt sitting in a Wendy's restaurant, hanging out with his youth pastor, on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday?

That was December 4, 1979. It was my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. In September of 2018, 39 years later, my youth pastor retired. He is also one of my closest friends. He is a mentor. He is a huge part of my life. I wrote him a note. In the note I teased him about our infamous lunch at Wendy's on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Even though I tease him about that often, I want to tell you that day was one of the most meaningful days in my life. My youth pastor, Mark Nazarian, I don't know whether he knew it, but at 19 I was drowning. I was drifting aimlessly. I was discouraged. I was lost. I was looking for something. I was searching for something. I was desperate for a purpose in life, for real meaning. That day my youth pastor invited me to come and see. It was the beginning of a relationship that transformed my life. Actually, it was the beginning of two relationships. I am grateful for both. It was the beginning of a beautiful and blessed friendship with Mark Nazarian. But more importantly, it was the beginning, the true beginning, of a relationship with Jesus Christ. In a hundred different ways my youth pastor told me, "We have found the Christ." In a hundred different ways my youth pastor invited me to "Come and see." And in one dramatic way my life was changed. I found the Christ. I found the Messiah. I found Jesus Christ. And my life has never been the same.

I once attended a banquet for a homeless ministry. It was a big fundraising dinner. There were lots of suits and fancy gowns and a few tuxedos. In some ways it was a strange setting to hear stories about the homeless, but it turned out to be a night I will never forget. The guest speaker at the banquet was a young man who graduated college and tried something that is definitely outside the box. He wanted to know what it felt like to be homeless, so for several months he gave up everything, lived on the street, traveled around, worked odd jobs, and begged to survive. He experienced the disgrace of being homeless. He experienced the shame of being homeless. He experienced the rejection of being homeless. His story was fascinating. But it wasn't his story that really grabbed my attention. As he was telling his story, he happened to tell a

story about someone else. He told a story about a woman he met at a banquet.

You see, after his simulated experience of being homeless, he became sort of famous. He started to receive invitations to speak at banquets like the one I was attending that night. He told about speaking at a similar banquet in New Jersey. As is often the case, he was sitting next to a gray-haired woman in her 70's at the banquet. Making small talk he asked her to tell him about herself. What she said stunned him.

She began by saying that she used to be a prostitute. Years ago, in her 20's, she worked the streets of a neighborhood in New Jersey. She had a pimp who used her to make money and supplied her with drugs. In that neighborhood, that neighborhood filled with pimps and prostitutes, a Christian woman had rented an apartment. That Christian woman pitched her tent among a neighborhood filled with trouble and disgrace. That Christian woman left whatever "normal" life she had and embarked on a downward spiral. She followed God's call to a part of the city where the walls were broken down and the streets were in ruins. That Christian woman tried to reach out to the young prostitute. But the young prostitute ignored her and kept living her desperate life. As I reflect on that story, the Christian woman tried in every way she could to tell that young prostitute, "We have found the Christ." The young prostitute ignored the good news. The young prostitute refused to hear the good news. No matter how the Christian woman extended the invitation, the young prostitute would not come and see.

Until...one night her pimp got mad at her, beat her badly, and left her lying in a bloody mess on the street. Sometime late that night the Christian woman came upon the young prostitute lying by the side of the road, beaten and broken. The Christian woman picked her up and carried her home to her small apartment. She nursed her back to health. Sometime during the process of allowing her body to heal, this young prostitute found another healing. She found the Lord. She became a Christian. Her life was changed.

Well, that Christian woman who lived among all the addicts and pimps and prostitutes grew old. She either died or moved away. I can't remember which. But when that Christian woman either died or moved

away, that woman who had been a prostitute moved into that very apartment and she became the Christian woman in a neighborhood of great trouble and disgrace, the Christian woman who embraced the call of the Christian life, the Christian woman who shared God's love with the least, the last, and the lost. That young prostitute who found Jesus became the person who told everyone she met, "We have found the Christ." She became the one who said to others, to ones who were hurting and helpless, longing for love and tired of losing, she became the one who said to others, "Come and see."

Jesus asked those two men that day, "What do you want?"

They asked him, "Where are you staying?"

He said, "Come and see."

Hardly the stuff of an intriguing story or encounter. A couple of questions back and forth and an invitation. Hardly the seeds to produce any serious fruit. On the surface it seems less than promising. But those two questions back and forth, the invitation to come and see, the acceptance of that invitation, and the next thing you know one of the men invited to come and see is tracking down his brother to tell him some amazingly good news. "We have found the Messiah."

I was reading some comments a few bible scholars made about this little encounter where Jesus says, "Come and see." Two of those commentators, two of those bible scholars, used the exact same phrase. They said his invitation to "Come and see" set off a chain reaction.

Maybe today is the day you become part of that chain reaction. Maybe today is the day you hear someone say, "We have found the Christ." Maybe today you will accept the invitation to "Come and see." Maybe...maybe...I really do hope that maybe today is the day you carry on that chain reaction. Maybe today is the day you tell another person, "We have found the Christ." Maybe today is the day you invite another person, "Come and see." And maybe, just maybe, your words and your witness will help yet one more person to say, "We have found the Christ."